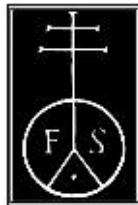




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A Note on the word *śrī*'s travel from Sanskrit to Tamil and Manipravala¹

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Abstract: *Śrī* is a versatile term that was brought into Tamil relatively early, rendered into (rather than translated) in various ways, sometimes even depending on whether it stands as an individual word or in a compound, in order to convey the many meanings that it already had in Sanskrit. While the Ālvārs themselves play with its multiple nuances, it is the advent of the bilingual Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas that both increases its importance and the frequency of its use, and creates occasions for them to integrate its supposed etymological meanings, which the Tamil is not conversant with, into their theology. Thus, we have Ācāryas like Piḷlai Lokācārya, and especially the urbane Vedānta Deśika, who draw from older texts like the *Ahirbudhnyasamṛhitā* to enrich their works in Manipravala and Tamil, like the *Mumukṣuppaṭi* and *Sārasāram*, but also their poetry in Tamil in an innovative way, like when Deśika translates some of the etymological meanings of *śrī*, rather than the word itself, into Tamil in his *Mummaṇikkōvai*.

Introduction

The word *śrī* occupies a special place in the Śrīvaiṣṇava texts in Manipravala of the second millennium, being omnipresent, but also appearing in many different forms in its many layers of meanings. Some questions immediately rise at this point: When did the word make its appearance in Tamil? How has it been used in Tamil across time? Is it used as such? Or is rendered and/or translated? Why? Were there clashes with Tamil when the word was introduced? Or was it integrated seamlessly in the southern language? What changes did the word undergo (or did not) in the new milieu? How do the different generations of writers use it? While seeking to answer some of these questions, which may not provide definite or exhaustive answers at this stage, we shall in parallel note down the challenges faced by the modern translator when dealing with the word and its variants, made more challenging by a few issues produced by the existent reference works, which shall also be notified as and when we come across them. In order to trace the path of the word in this very brief essay, I shall first briefly examine its origins, i.e. its debut and presence in the Sanskrit texts, after which I shall follow its entry into Tamil, via the Prakrit languages. I shall then analyse how the word

¹ I thank Elisa Freschi and Daniele Cuneo for inviting me to give this paper at the 10th International Coffee Break Conference. Many people, such as Jonas Buchholz, Giovanni Ciotti, Victor D'Avella, Harunaga Isaacson, S. L. P. Anjaneya Sarma and Eva Wilden, helped me generously when I sought their help, and my thanks are due to them, although all shortcomings are *entirely* mine. I also thank the two anonymous reviewers whose suggestions helped me improve this essay, as well as Artemij Keidan for his encouragement and support.

was first used by the Ālvārs, Tamil Vaiṣṇava poets (6th-9th century), and then how it is imaginatively wielded by the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas (from the 12th c. onwards).

1. From Sanskrit into Tamil

Already used in the *Rgveda* (ca. 1400–1000 BCE), the oldest meanings of the word *śrī* are *Schönheit* ('beauty'), *Glanz* ('splendour'), *Pracht* ('splendour, magnificence') and *Herrlichkeit* ('magnificence, glory'), belonging thus to a lexical field of beauty and brilliance. The word evolves to also mean *Gedeihen* ('prosperity') and *Reichtum* ('wealth') (Mayrhofer 1996: 669) to its existent meanings. Further meanings were derived over the time, as recorded by *Monier Williams* (MW; s.v. *śrī*): from 'auspiciousness, good fortune' to 'high rank, power, might, majesty, royal dignity' (from the *Atharvaveda* [1200-1000 BCE] onwards), and perhaps more importantly for us, it is used as a name for Lakṣmī, from the *Śatapathabrahmaṇa* (7th BCE-3rd BCE) onwards.² A key text that is a result of this semantic evolution is the *Śrīsukta*, part of the *Rgvedakhilāni* ('apocrypha'), which invokes Śrī-Lakṣmī, glorifying Her in a superlative way, using the term eight times in 32 lines.³ And equally prevalent is the usage of the word as an honorific prefix for important people, and a respectful title, something that will be extensively adopted by the Śrīvaiṣṇavas in the second millennium.

By the time this word entered Tamil, most of these meanings had come into use. But when did that happen? And in what form did the word irrupt into Tamil? What happened to it when it did? Searching for the word *śrī* in the *Madras Tamil Lexicon* (TL), we can notice that many of its Sanskrit meanings (except for 'brilliance'), as given in the MW, make their appearance here, albeit in a different order:⁴

² - H1. 1. *śrī* (cf. *v śrā*) **śrīṇati, śrīṇite** (...) to mix, mingle, cook (...), RV. ; TS. ; VS. ; Br. ; (= v 1. *śri*), to burn, flame, diffuse light, RV.

- H2. 2. *śrī* mfn. (ifc.) mixing, mingling, mixed with; *śrī* f. mixing, cooking.

- H3. 3. *śrī* f. (prob. to be connected with *v 1. śri* and also with *v 1.śrī* in the sense of 'diffusing light or radiance'; nom. *śrīs* accord. to some also *śrī*) light, lustre, radiance, splendour, glory, beauty, grace, loveliness (...), RV. &c. &c. **prosperity, welfare, good fortune, success, auspiciousness, wealth, treasure, riches** (...), high rank, power, might, majesty, royal dignity (...), AV. &c. &c. symbol or insignia of royalty, Vikr. iv, 13 **N. of Lakṣmī** (as goddess of prosperity or beauty and wife of Viṣṇu, produced at the churning of the ocean, also as daughter of Bhṛgu and as mother of Darpa), ŚBr. &c. &c. **N. of Sarasvatī** (...) of a daughter of king Suśarman, Kathās. of various metres, Col. (the following only in L. 'a lotus-flower; intellect, understanding; speech; cloves; (...); a kind of drug = *vṛddhi*; **N. of a Buddhist goddess** and of the mother of the 17th Arhat')

- *śrī* m. N. of the fifth musical Rāga (...)

- *śrī* mfn. diffusing light or radiance, splendid, radiant, beautifying, adorning (...), RV. iv, 41, 8. [The word *śrī* is frequently used as an honorific prefix (= 'sacred', 'holy') to the names of deities (...), and may be repeated two, three, or even four times to express excessive veneration. (...); it is also used as a respectful title (like 'Reverend') to the names of eminent persons as well as of celebrated works and sacred objects (...), and is often placed at the beginning or back of letters, manuscripts, important documents &c.; also before the words *caranya* and *pāda* 'feet', and even the end of personal names.] (bold mine).

³ I thank one of the anonymous reviewers who reminded me of the existence of this very important text.

⁴ Please note that throughout this essay, I have removed the examples given by the TL and the GHTL here but left the sources of those quotations in the abbreviated forms in which they appear, as they are useful for this study here. See TL (1936: lxix-xcvi) and GHTL (2001: xii-xxii) for their respective list of abbreviations.

śrī, n. < Śrī. 1. **Lakṣmī**; *ilakkumi*. 2. **Wealth**. (takkayākap. 435, *urai*). 3. **Felicity**. 4. **Beauty**; 5. **A title of respect prefixed to the names** of deities, eminent persons, sacred places and things; (takkayākap. 375, *urai*). (TL) (definitions are in bold and examples are underlined).

It is worth noting that ‘Lakṣmī’ is cited first to indicate the prevalence of this meaning vis-à-vis the others in Tamil, but without an example accompanying it. And the literary examples given to illustrate some meanings are from an anonymous 16th c.- commentary on the war poem *Takkayākaparaṇi* (12th c.). While discussing the logic behind the order of the meanings given, the editors of the TL claim that,

Where chronological arrangement is possible, it is followed. Where it is not possible, a logical arrangement is followed; but this is modified by the principle of arranging the meanings in the order of comparative familiarity in usage. In words of non-Tamil origin, the senses they bear in the original tongue are given precedence over their significances, irrespective of chronological order. (1936: lviii)

This is what they must have done with this particular Sanskrit *tatsama*. As for the illustrations, it is worth noting *en passant* that the TL editors do not claim to give the oldest occurrence of an attested meaning in its plan, which sometimes creates the impression that a certain meaning came into being at a much later time than it had, as seen above. However, when explaining the choice of illustrations, they merely say that “Where necessary and possible, the meanings given are supported by appropriate quotations” (1936: lx), without clearly discussing their position on the date of the text from which they choose their illustrations, which is of crucial importance. However, when they state that “*Nikanṭu* works are cited as they afford some guidance about the period when they came into use”, they insinuate that the date of the usage is important, too. So why not give an earlier example for the 5th definition “A title of respect prefixed to the names...”, for example? The early Manipravala texts use the word abundantly in that sense. If we take the example of the earliest of them, Tirukkurukai Pirāṇ Pillāṇ’s *Ārāyirappaṭi* (12th century),⁵ the first commentary on Nammālvār’s *Tiruvāyāmoli*, it reverently refers to the *Bhagavadgītā* as *śrīgītai* (1.3.5), Goddess Earth as *śrībhūmi pirāṭṭi* (TVM 1.9.4), and so forth, and perhaps for the first time in a Tamil literary text, it mentions the Śrivaiṣṇavas (e.g., 2.5.9).

To get back to the word śrī, our next stop is the *Glossary of Historical Tamil Literature* (GHTL), since, oddly enough, the *Glossary of Historical Tamil Vaishnava Prose* does not have a separate entry for śrī at all, although it is exclusively dedicated to a field that made the most of the word (as we shall see later):

śrī (pe) – *mahimai*: “*aruccuṇaṇ āvāṇ śrī śrīkuruṣṇāmicam*” (pā:u:⁶179)

Only one definition (*mahimai* ‘greatness’), which is possibly not the most important one, is given here, with the example taken from another (undated) commentary on Villiputtūrār’s *Pārātam* (ca. 1400 CE), the best known Tamil retelling of the *Mahābhārata*. So we can notice that both reference works (the TL and the GHTL) give references from second-millennium compositions (and none for Śrī as Lakṣmī). What could be the reason for this? Was the word

⁵ It is possible that the GHTL does not consider this hybrid language as being Tamil proper, although the TL does quote abundantly from the Śrivaiṣṇava Manipravala works.

⁶ pā:u. means *pārata urai* ‘commentary on the *Pāratam*’.

even used before 1400 CE? A cursory glance at the *Glossary of Tamil Inscriptions* (GTI) clarifies some of the issues:

śrī (pe) *tiru* - (TAMIZ, 1970, p.122)
 śrī (pe) *celvam* ('wealth') (SII, iv., 531)⁷

The first entry glosses śrī with *tiru*, and the illustration is from an 8th-century inscription; and the second one, 'wealth' is illustrated with a 9th-century inscription.⁸

We can observe at this stage that the *tatsama* śrī is already used in the first millennium, but apparently only in the inscriptions, while its use in the literary works occurs from roughly the beginning of the second millennium. However, reference works such as the TL⁹ and the GHTL, perhaps unintentionally misleading, do not cite the oldest occurrences of the word, which is used in abundance, as mentioned above, in the Śrīvaiṣṇava works in Manipravala. As for the Tamil works of the first millennium, they do seem to have used the word, but maybe in its *tadbhava* forms, *tiru*, as notified by the GTI, as well as *cīr*.

2. *Tiru* and *cīr*

The word śrī can be rendered in many different ways, especially when it occurs in a compound word. Here is a non-exhaustive list of examples taken from the TL:

cīrī-vayinnavar, n. < śrī-vaiṣṇava. Vaiṣṇavites. (T. A. S. II, 175.)
cīrītaran̄, n. < Śrī-dhara. Viṣṇu. (tiv. iyār̄. nāñmu. 62).
cīripalam, n. < śrī-phala. Bael. (malai.)
cī < śrī. n. 1. Lakṣmī. (kantaran. 8). 2. Light, brilliancy. (kantaran. 69).-- part. An honorific prefix added to the names of deities, eminent persons and sacred objects.
cīrpātam, n. < śrī-pāda. See cīpātam. (tiruppu. 94).
tītalām, n. perh. śrī-dala. Mango. (malai.)

Thus, in compound words, śrī takes many forms in Tamil, such as *cīri*, *cīrī*, *cīrī*, *cī*, *cīr*, *śrī*, *ti*,¹⁰ but śrī -> *cīrī* and śrī -> *ti* seem to have only one occurrence each, so they could be hapax legomena. The Sanskrit borrowing was probably modified according to the phonological constraints of Tamil, as well as of the languages on their travel route into Tamil, i.e. the one or the other Prakrit languages, which explains the variety of its pronunciation. But, as we shall see, as a whole word, śrī is mostly rendered as *tiru*, or sometimes as *cīr*.

⁷ *South Indian Inscriptions*, iv, 531 (p.172, AR No 83 of 1892)

⁸ The first inscription belongs to the times of Nandivarman II (Pallavamallan); and the second one, which is from Lalgudi, belongs to the period of King Vijayanṛpatuṅgavikramavarman's times (Rt. 855-896 CE).

⁹ Please note that the TL quotes from the *South Indian inscriptions* (S. I. I.) for most of its illustrations of compound words incorporating śrī.

¹⁰ Even *ci* might be possible, if we are to believe a popular story on Kampān (12th c.), the poet who wrote the Tamil version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, transmitted through oral traditions (Pulavar 1957: 72): forced by a courtesan called Ponni (*tāci* < Skt. *dāsī*-), Kampān signs a deed in which he admits that he is 'the slave of *tāci* Ponni', but later on explains to the king that he was 'the slave of the auspicious (*ci*) Mother (*tā*, contracted form of *tāy*) Lakṣmī (*ponni*, or 'the golden woman'). *Ci* thus is taken to be a *tadbhava* of Śrī. This undatable anecdote without a proper source is, of course, no evidence. However, see the last paragraph of "4. The Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas and Śrī" for a more acceptable example.

How do we know that the word *tiru* derives from *śrī*?¹¹ M. B. Emeneau (1953: 106-7) shows in a convincing way how it is phonetically possible for *śrī* to become *tiru* progressively, by coming to the Dravidian languages via a Prakrit form, *siri*.¹² How early was the word *tiru* used in Tamil? What did it primarily mean?

The earliest meanings of the word in Tamil, too, were linked with ‘brightness’ and ‘beauty’, as this *Kuruntokai* (205) verse (out of many of them) to be found in the Caṅkam corpus would show:¹³

tēm kamal tiru nutal ūrtarum pacappē

Pallor creeps up the **bright** forehead that smells of honey[-filled flowers].

As for the important meaning of Tiru-Lakṣmī, it came later, but pre-existed the Ālvār poetry, as these examples from 6th c. works, such as the *Paripāṭāl* and the *Kalittokai*, demonstrate:

tiruvīṇ kaṇava (*Paripāṭāl* 3)

‘O Husband of Tiru!’

tiru maṇu mārpan (*Kalittokai* 104.10)

‘He with the chest with Tiru and a mole/Tiru on a mole’

The earliest references to Tiru as Lakṣmī/Śrī in inscriptions occur at roughly the same time, as a look at the bigger Ciṇṇamanūr Pāṇḍya plates (7th CE) show:

77 *tiruvoṭun tellamirta[t*]toṭuñc ceṇkatirolik kaustubhattoṭum a-*

78 *ruvimatak kalīroñroṭun tōñri* (...)

Having appeared with *tiru*, with clear nectar, with the Kaustubha[-gem] bright with red hues, and with a male elephant with must [like] a waterfall ...

In this inscription that compares the Pāṇḍya king to Viṣṇu, *tiru* appears in what seems to be a list of elements that came out during the churning of the milk ocean. Since Nārāyaṇa is believed to adorn His chest with the Kaustubha gem and Śrī, the term *tiru* here indeed seems like a reference to Śrī-Lakṣmī. If we turn now our focus on some of the oldest extant Tamil thesauri, something uncommon transpires from them. The *Piṇḍikalam* (ca. 6th – 7th c.), for example, glosses *tiru* thus:

tiru ilakkumiyum celvamum ākum. (*sūtra* 613)

¹¹ Although used in the Caṅkam literature itself (ca. 1st-5th CE) as we shall see, *tiru* does not seem to be of Dravidian origin (not that it would matter), for the *Dravidian Etymological Dictionary* (DEDR) does not list it. But then, as Eva Warden pointed out to me in a personal communication, the DEDR was made based on the TL, and since the TL attributes a Sanskrit origin to *tiru*, the DEDR could be following suit.

¹² I am quoting here a large portion of Emeneau’s arguments here, as they are very useful to the discussion at hand: “Skt. *śrī*, whence Pkt. *cirī* as a name of the goddess Lakṣmī or Śrī, as well as in a few compounds where the meaning is ‘holiness, sacredness.’ This is derived from Skt. *śrī* (...). Much more common, from an early period, as the Ta. representative of this Skt. word in the meanings ‘Lakṣmī, śrī, holiness, sacredness, beauty, prosperity,’ is *tiru*; it is very common, as is Skt. *śrī*, as the initial morpheme in names (...). There seems to be little possibility of *tiru* being a native Dr. word, since it has all the meanings of Skt. *śrī* and since there are beside it in Dr. no related words different from it in formation. (...) This word *tiru* has been taken to be a borrowing from Skt. *śrī*. (...) Difficulties have been pointed out (...) viz. that Skt. *ś* is regularly represented by Ta. *c* rather than by *t*, and that the final *u* instead of *i* is unexplained. The solution of the first difficulty is easy (...): the word is borrowed from a Prakrit form *siri* rather than from Skt. *śrī*; Skt. Pkt. *s*, both initial and medial is frequently represented by Ta. *t*. [As for the second problem] a final solution must take account of the variant forms Ka. *tira*, *titi*, *tiru*, *siti*, Ma. *tiru*, *tiri*, *ciru*, *ciri*, Te. *tiru*, *siri*, and probably will have to await a chronology which can probably be provided only by minute philological examination of texts. For the moment, however, we can, I think, accept in a provisional way that *tiru* is a borrowing from Pkt. *siri* < Skt. *śrī*.”

¹³ I thank Eva Warden for pointing this out to me.

tiru is “Lakṣmī” and “wealth”.

This short entry leaves out the meanings of ‘brightness’ and ‘beauty’. Another thesaurus, the 9th c. (?) *Tivākaram*, associates *tiru* with Lakṣmī and gives a series of other names of the Goddess.¹⁴ The later *Cūtāmanī* is a slight improvement upon the *Piṅkalam*:

tiruveṇpa kamalai celvañ cirappoṭu muppēr ceppum

They say that *tiru* means the three words, viz. ‘Kamalā [Lakṣmī]’, ‘wealth’ and ‘excellence’.

Why do the Tamil *nīkaṇṭus* leave out the common and oldest meanings (apparently both in Sanskrit and in Tamil) of ‘brightness’ and ‘beauty’? It is not clear.

Before we move on to the next part of our study, let us have a look at the entry *tiru* in the TL, in order to check its semantic gains in Tamil:

TL: *tiru*, n. prob. śrī. [T. K. M. *tiru*.] 1. **Lakṣmī**, the Goddess of Wealth and Prosperity. (*tiv. periyati*, 7, 7, 1). 2. **Wealth, riches, affluence**. (*kural*, 568). 3. **Distinction, eminence**; *cirappu*. (cūtā.) 4. **Beauty**. (*maturaik*. 448). 5. **Brilliance**. (*ītu*, 3, 5, 10). 6. **Fertility**. (*tirukkō*. 114). 7. **Blessing, fortune**. (*kural*, 1072). 8. **Holiness; sacredness..** 9. **Good karma**. (*cīvaka*. 2552). 10. **Astrologer**. (*S. I. I. ii*, 294). 11. **Wedding badge**. (*S. I. I. ii*, 157). 12. **An ancient head-ornament** (*piṇi*). (*kūlapa*. 140). 13. **A deity supposed to be seated on women's breasts**. (bold and underlining mine).

We can notice that a few important things here: firstly, the word has acquired over time a variety of nuances, some of which seem to encompass the many meanings of the Sanskrit original, and some more (e.g., ‘astrologer’, ‘wedding badge’). Secondly, by not choosing the chronological order for stating the meanings¹⁵ (let alone trying to give the earliest examples¹⁶) the editors of the TL treat *tiru* as a non-Tamil word (see above), which is rather a questionable

¹⁴ *pori, mā, ākkam, celvi, pon, pūmakal, / ceyyāl, intirai, tirumakal* peyarē
kamalai, patumai, vimalai, kōkaṇakai, / aṇaiyavum ava! peyar ākum enpa. (1.18)
'*pori, mā, ākkam, celvi, pon, pūmakal, ceyyāl, intirai* are names of *tiru-maka!* (Śrī-woman).
They say that *kamalai, patumai, vimalai, kōkaṇakai* and the like are her names'.

¹⁵ A look at the GHTL, which seems to follow the TL closely, will complete our idea as to how these reference works function.:

1. **celvam (wealth)** (*kuru*:181:6-7). 2. **alaku (beauty)** (*kuru*:205:7). 3. **ceyyāl (ilakkumi) (the Red One, Lakṣmī)** (*aka*:13:6). 4. **nīla nīram (blue colour)** (*aka*:138:17). 5. **tirut takavīrāyatōr uḷla nikalcci (A choice event that has the quality of tiru)** (*tol*:24:25). 6. **amaiti (peace)** (*cīru*:157). 7. **naṇmai (goodness)**: (*kural*:108:2). 8. **tiru makal vatīvāna pāvai (a doll in the form of Śrī)** (*peruṇi*:63:30). 9. **cītēvi ennum talai ani (a head ornament called Śrīdevī)** (*teyva utti*) (*kār*:34). 10. **teyat tanmai (śrī) (divine nature [Śrī])**: (*cam*:1:60:6). 11. **polivu (brightness)** (*kōvai*:124). 12. **nal viṇa (good karma)** (*cīva*:12:175). 13. **tāli (wedding badge)** (*cun*:12:5). 14. **pori (speck)** (*nika.ti*:11:343). 15. **maṇkalac col (an auspicious word)**: (*nika.pi*:6:261). 16. **cāṇaki (Jānakī)** (*nika.pi*:10:479). 17. **pon (gold)** (*nika.pi*:10:871). 18. **cirappu (excellence)** (*nika.cū*:11:200).

While it is not possible to get into details here, here are a few remarks relevant to the topic at hand: the GHTL is close to the TL in terms of the meanings that it gives. Although it does cite older examples, they are by no means the oldest available (e.g., 11 for the meaning ‘brightness’). Some of the examples given here do not illustrate the particular meaning that they are supposed to (e.g., for definition 1, *tiru* means ‘shining’, not ‘wealth’). For definition 3, the example is from a late poem within the Caṇkam collection of poems, the *Akanāṇūru*, as it uses the word *āram* (*hāra*) twice, which does not exist in other Caṇkam works like the *Kuruntokai* or the *Nārīṇai*. Definitions 4 and 6 are wrong (and so on and so forth), as explained to me by Eva Wilden in a personal communication. It is possible that some of these improbable definitions given here are based on the lexicographers’ readings of commentaries. And the commentators sometimes interpret a word as they deem fit, at times perhaps according to the context, but most probably based on the meanings that the word had acquired by their time, whether medieval or modern.

¹⁶ For example, we have seen that ‘beauty’ and ‘brilliance’ are some of the oldest meanings of the word, and yet, the TL gives quotations from the *Maturaikkāñci* (5th CE) and even later works, viz. the *ītu* (14th CE), respectively.

choice, as the word made its entry in the very early centuries of the modern era, and seems to have been seamlessly adopted in Tamil, where it kept thriving and acquiring new meanings.

The case of *cīr* is more complex than that of *tiru*, as it appears to have meanings that are similar to both *śrī* and *tiru*, but not just. If we begin with the TL, we can notice that there are (at least) two distinct groups of meanings:

cīr 2, n. cf. *śrī*. 1. **Prosperity, wealth.** (piṅ.) 2. **Beauty, gracefulness.** (*malaipatū*. 570). 3. **Goodness.** (tivā.) 4. [M. *cīr*.] **Greatness, excellence, superiority.** (*purānā*. 1). 5. **Paramount importance.** (*tirumuru*. 220). 6. **Esteem, regard.** (pu. ve. 9, 22). 7. **Reputation, fame.** (*kalit*. 30). 8. **Nature, characteristic.** (*nap. potu*. 32). 9. **Good, normal condition.** 10. **Literal meaning.** (aka. ni.) 11. **Equilibrium, evenness.** (*kamparā. akat*. 40). 12. **Balance.** (piṅ.) 13. **Measure; quantity.** (*purānā*. 6, 8). 14. **Heaviness.** (*patirrup*. 22). 15. **Libra of the zodiac.** (cūṭā.) 16. **Shoulder-staff for carrying burden.** (tivā.) (*malaipatū*. 154). 17. **Club, bludgeon.** (piṅ.) 18. (Mus.) **Time-measure.** (*purānā*. 24, 6). 19. **Song.** (*kalit*. 131, 24). 20. **Metrical foot.** (tol. po. 313). 21. **Sound of musical instruments.** (tivā.) 22. **Sound.** (aka. ni.) ...

Up to definition 9, *cīr* has meanings similar to *tiru* and *śrī* (but it is worth noting here that the TL does *not* define *cīr* as Śrī-Lakṣmī, an issue that we will get back to). And then another set of definitions derive from a different root that seems to mean ‘measure, balance’, which neither *śrī*, nor *tiru* seems to be associated with. How is this possible? An added challenge is that *cīr* has a perfectly attested Dravidian root as well, as this entry from the *Dravidian Etymological Dictionary (Revised)* shows:

DEDR 2624: *Ta. cīr* (-pp-, -tt-) to be excellent, be superior, be suitable, fitting (as an opportunity), fall into rhythmic movement; *n.* prosperity, wealth, beauty, gracefulness, goodness, greatness, excellence, superiority, paramount importance, esteem, regard, reputation, fame, nature, good normal condition, literal meaning, equilibrium, evenness, balance, measure, quantity, heaviness; time-measure, song, metrical foot, sound of musical instruments (...)

And here, too, we can notice that there are meanings belonging to two streams. In a personal communication, Eva Wilden suggested that *cīr* is a Tamil word, whose “original meaning is probably weight. From there both important extensions are explicable, namely weight in the sense of excellence, fame (which than later is associated with *śrī*) and weight in the sense of poetic measure as in *cīr*, metrical foot, and in *cīr*, rhythm...”. While this sounds like a reasonable argument, another possibility suggests itself to me: when *śrī* came via the Prakrit variant *siri/sirī*, it may have met with the Tamil word *cīr* (which meant ‘measure, weight’, etc.) and got assimilated with it, along with its meanings of beauty, excellence, and so forth. We need to dig deeper into the question, which is beyond the scope of this essay, before providing a definite answer.

3. *Tiru* and the Ālvārs

We are now stepping into a special period of time (6th-9th CE), among a set of saint-poets, who were particularly disposed towards using the word *tiru* and its variants more than their literary predecessors: with bhakti, the word *tiru* gained much more importance than ever in Tamil, as the Ālvārs (and the Śaiva Nāyanāmars, but maybe to a lesser extent¹⁷) played with

¹⁷ One of the anonymous reviewers suggested that I also look into the Tamil Śaiva material, which would show that the word *tiru* was “ubiquitous and trans-sectarian”, and that the “Vaiṣṇavas did not have a monopoly on

the different nuances of the word ('brilliant, wealth, beautiful, Lakṣmī, sacred' and more), so that both the word and its various meanings were heartily embraced by them.¹⁸ Here are a few examples of how *tiru* was used in the Ālvār poetry:

araṇkatt' ammāṇ tiru āra mārpu (*Amalaṇ āti pirāṇ* 5)

'the chest of the Lord of Raṅgam with Śrī/lustre [and] a pearl necklace'

This example is reminiscent of the pre-bhakti poetry of the *Kalittokai* and the *Paripāṭal* quoted above, in which Tiru is described as sitting upon Nārāyaṇa's chest. Sometimes the references get slightly more complex than this:

tiruvukkum tiru ākiya celvā (*Periya Tirumoli* 7.7.1)

'O Lord, who are the śrī of Śrī Herself!'

This verse shows signs of intertextuality that cuts across languages, as *tiruvukkum tiru* seems like a direct translation of *śriyah śrī* found in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* (2.44.15¹⁹), and is later taken up by the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas.²⁰ While the first *tiru* seems like a proper name that refers to Lakṣmī in all probability, the second one seems like a quality, e.g., auspiciousness: thus, Nārāyaṇa is Śrī's *śrītvā* ('Śrī-ness'). The Ālvārs explore other meanings and usages of the word in their poetry:

tiru araṇkam ennā karuvilē tiru ilātīr! kālattaik kalikkirīrē

'O you, who do not have blessings/fortune (*tiru*) as a foetus, who do not say "Śrīraṅgam"! You are spending away time!' (*Tirumālai* 11)

Here, the first *tiru* ('sacred') seems to function like an adjective that qualifies the name of an important place, and this practice must have started between the post-Caṇkam and the bhakti periods.²¹ As for the second *tiru*, it is more like the quality that we came across in the previous example, maybe with a more theologically-charged meaning, from the later medieval times onwards: thus, Periyavāccāṇi Pillai, the renowned Śrīvaiṣṇava commentator (13th century) glosses *karuvilē tiru ilātār* as *garbhattilum bhagavatkaṭākṣam illāmai* 'lack of the Lord's side-glance even in the womb', before quoting *jāyamānam hi puruṣam yam paśyen madhusūdanaḥ* ('The soul whom He sees while being born') from the *Mahābhārata* (12.336.68). Here, *tiru* is glossed as 'God's side glance', which is a euphemism for God's grace.

it". While this is absolutely true, dealing with that is beyond the scope of this article, which also has space constraints.

¹⁸ Please note that *śrī* does not appear in the Ālvār poetry, just as it mostly does not figure in the literary texts of the first millennium.

¹⁹ This is not in the critical edition but can be found for example in the Sastrigal et al. 1933 edition.

²⁰ Kūrattālvāṇi's *Śrīvaikuṇṭhastvam* (29) and *Sundarabāhustavam* (69), for example, use the same expression (*śriyah śriyam*).

²¹ The words *tiru* /*śrī* are prefixed to place names in the so-called Tamil land (e.g., Śrīraṅgam, Tirupati, etc.). A glance at the town names in the Caṇkam work *Kuṇṭtokai* shows us that this was not practiced in the older times, at least not as far as the places mentioned in this particular work are concerned (example of town names: Ārkkāṭu, Urṇtai, Kuṇḍumpūr, Tonṭi, Marantai, Pāṭali; see Wilden 2006: 385). This practice of adding the suffix may have begun roughly with (or a little before) the Tamil bhakti poets, the Ālvārs and the Nāyaṇmārs, who described a particular place as being sacred, beautiful (*tiru* + *veṇkatam*) and the compound may have become crystallized over time, probably during the bhakti period itself. This is not to say that this practice did not exist before the bhakti poets, but that they may have given the impetus to promote it, intentionally or otherwise. And while translating, it is important to know whether we consider them as lexicalized nouns or take them separately to convey the right nuance.

Thus, with the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas, from roughly the 12th century onwards, begins another stage in the use of *śrī/tiru*.

4. The Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas and *śrī*

The advent of the bilingual Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas both increases the importance of the word *śrī* as well as its Tamil variant *tiru*, and the frequency of their use. For example, both *śrī* and *tiru* are used to prefix any word (noun, verb...) that is related to Nārāyaṇa and/or His devotees, and therefore deemed sacred:

tirumukhamanḍalam ('the sacred face')

tiruvalaku (lit. 'sacred broom', i.e. a broom used in the temples for example)

śrīpādatīrtham (water gathered from washing the feet of important people, like the Ācāryas)

*śricūrṇam*²² ('sacred paste' used for making sectarian marks on the forehead)

The suffix is also added to words that take a different meaning altogether:

tiruvaṭi – (lit. 'the sacred feet') – Hanumān²³

When the word is lexicalized as *tiruvaṭi*, it refers to this great devotee of the Lord (Rāma in this case), with the devotees being considered by the Śrīvaiṣṇavas to be His feet. And of course, humorous phrases have also adopted the suffix:

tiru cāttu cāttutal = to beat somebody up²⁴

With the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas, *śrī* seems omnipresent, in both its versions, and their imaginative interpretations and uses of it are most baffling, as we shall see.

The commentators sometimes gloss and/or define *tiru* from an Ālvār verse as a dictionary would. Thus, the following extract from *Tiruvāyamoli* 2.7.2, *cīr aṇaṇk' amarar piṇar palarum toḷutu ētta* ('as Goddess Śrī, the immortals and many others worshipped and praised [Him]'), is commented upon thus by Tirukkurukai Pirāṇ Piḷāṇ (12th century) in his *Aṛāyirappaṭi* commentary:

cīr aṇaṇku periyapirāṭṭiyārum

'*cīr aṇaṇku*: 'and the Elder Goddess' [i.e. Lakṣmī]

Vādikesari Alakiya Maṇavāla Cīyar (13th century) adds another interpretation in his *Pannīrāyirappaṭi* commentary:

1. *guṇottarar-āy divyar-āṇa [devarkaṭum]*, 2. *cīr aṇaṇk' enṭu lakṣmi ākavumām*

1. '[of the gods,] who are superior in good qualities', 2. It is also 'Lakṣmī' [when taken] as 'the auspicious goddess'.

For the first interpretation, he takes *cīr* as 'divine' (*divya*), and *aṇaṇku*- as a verbal root, 'to be joined with'. And it becomes an attribute for the celestials ('the immortals endowed with divinity'). For the second interpretation, *cīr aṇaṇku* ('goddess Śrī') is taken to be a reference to Goddess Lakṣmī (thus the first word in a list, i.e. 'Goddess Śrī, the immortals, etc.'). The commentator's choice is supposed to be the last of the options that they suggest, so it must

²² All these words can be checked in the *Glossary of Historical Tamil Vaishnava Prose*.

²³ Please note that Garuḍa and Hanumān are referred to as Periya- ('elder') and Ciriya- ('younger') Tiruvaṭi, respectively, but when *tiruvaṭi* is used on its own, it is a reference to the latter.

²⁴ Please note that the expression in Tamil is not found in the reference works, but is part of dialectal usage, used in modern prose (See for example, Kalki's novel *Ponniyin Celvan*, chapter 2). Translating this into French could work better for example, 'donner de sacrés coups'.

be the case here, too. Importantly here, we can see that, despite the TL not stating the meaning of Śrī-Lakṣmī for *cīr*, some early Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas did take it as such, along with *tiru*. We shall see another example of that later on.

With Śrī being more than a word that means a thing or a quality, as it refers to a Goddess—and one growing in importance with the Śrīvaiṣṇavas (the prefix in whose communal name is significant)—, and śrī being part of some of the important mantras of this community,²⁵ the word attracts increasing attention, as it receives commentarial gloss and large portions of explanations in their *rahasyagranthas* ('esoteric works'). Looking into the roots of the word is one of the ways in which the Ācāryas have proceeded. For example, in his *Mumukṣuppaṭi*, Piṭṭai Lokācārya writes the *sūtra* (124) Śrīyate Śrayate, which Aṇṇāṅkarācāryar (1952: 58) explains thus in his *Sārārtha-dīpikai*:

intā śrīśabdām āṇatū 'śrīñ sevāyām' eṇkīra dhātuvilē iraṇṭu vakaiyāṇa vyutpattiyyāl niṣpannam ākum.
Śrīyate iti Śrīḥ - itu karmaṇi vyutpatti, Śrayate iti Śrīḥ - itu karttari vyutpatti.

'This word Śrī can be derived from the root śrīñ sevāyām through two types of derivations. Śrī is someone who is worshipped - this is the passive voice, and Śrī is someone who worships - this is the active voice.'

Theological ideas are given voice to by such analyses, especially given that the nature and role of Śrī are a matter of disagreement between the two groups of Śrīvaiṣṇavas.²⁶ But leaving this issue aside, we may wonder if such a going back to the roots is possible with the variant *tiru*, with the latter apparently being etymologically distant from its root śrī. Have the Ācāryas managed to play with its root meanings, the way they have with śrī, and if so, with what levels of success?

Vedānta Deśika, the philosopher and master poet (*inter alia*) from the 14th CE, takes the different *tadbhavas* of śrī and weaves their different layers of meanings into the first verse of his *Mummaṇikkōvai*, said to be his very first poem in Tamil. Although this first verse meant to be an invocation to Nārāyaṇa (in His form as the main Deity in the temple town of Tiruvahindrapuram, namely, Devanāyaka), it actually seems to be more directed at Śrī, or at least to the Divine Couple (*divyadampati*) together:

aruḷ tarum aṭiyar pāl meyyai vaittu, / teruḷ tara niṇṭra teyva nāyaka! niṇ
aruḷ eṇum cīr ṥr arivai āṇat' eṇa / iruḷ ceka emakk' ṥr in oḷi viṭakk' āy,
maṇi varai aṇṇa niṇ tiru uruvil / aṇi amar ākatt' alaṇkal āy ilaṇki,
niṇ paṭikk' ellām tan paṭi ēṛka, / aṇpuṭaṇ niṇṇōṭ' avataritt' aruḷi,
vēṇṭ' urai kēṭu, mīṇṭ' avai kēṭpittu, / īṇṭiya viṇaika! māṇṭiṭa muyaṇru,
tan aṭi cērnta tamar uṇai aṇuka, / niṇṇuṭaṇ cērntu niṛkum niṇ tiruvē !

O Lord of gods/Devanāyaka, who stand in order to give knowledge,

²⁵ For example, the two-lined *dvaya-mantra*.

²⁶ The various issues surrounding the perception of the role and nature of Śrī are complex. Briefly, for the Vaṭṭakalais ('northern school'), Nārāyaṇa and Śrī are a unique śeṣin/Master, and therefore, one means of salvation, whereas for the Teṅkalais ('southern school'), She is *not* equal to God, nor a separate means to liberation, but She mediates between an individual soul and God, thereby enabling the soul to achieve liberation through God's grace. For more on this topic, see Siauve 1978: 54fn2-3.

Having placed truth/[Your] body for the devotees who bestow grace²⁷!

Your Śrī (tiru) stands united with You,

[In such a way that one can] say that the **goodness (cīr)** that is Your grace has become a woman,

Becoming a lamp with a unique, sweet light for us, so that darkness is destroyed,
so that the servants who reached Her feet approach You,

Shining as a garland on [Your] bedecked chest on Your **beautiful/sacred (tiru)** form similar to a sapphire mountain,

graciously incarnating along with You with love, so that Her nature suits Your nature,
listening to words of entreaty, having them heard again, taking pains so that [their] abundant sins perish.

Firstly, we can see that Deśika uses both the variants *tiru* and *cīr*, and more than one meaning of *tiru*. And then, we can notice something interesting (see the underlined passages above): he describes Her as being One with Him; as being resorted to by the servants; as making those who come to Her to approach *Him*; as listening to something/someone; as having someone listen to something; and as destroying the devotees' sins. And Tamil poetry had never before been used to praise these particular roles of Śrī, perhaps because this is achieved by going back to the Sanskrit roots of the word, the way Pillai Lokācārya did (See **Error! Reference source not found.** above).²⁸ And in this particular case, Deśika may have had in mind the definitions of the root *śrī*, which he explains in more or less detail, in more than one work,²⁹ e.g., in his chapter on the *dvaya-mantra* of the *Sārasāram* (16.1), the *dvaya* being one of the three most sacred mantras for the Śrīvaiṣṇavas:

itil Śrīśabdam

śrṇāti nikhilān doṣān śrṇāti ca guṇair jagat ||

śrīyate cākhilair nityam śrayate ca param padam | (Ahrbudhnyasamhitā 51.61c-62b);

śrayantīm śrīyamāṇām ca śrṇantīm śrṇvantīm api | (Ahrbudhnyasamhitā 21.8cd)

ityādivacanaṅkaṭālē pala vyutpattikaṭai uṭaittāy irukkum.

In this, the word *śrī* possesses many derivations thanks to the words like:

1. *śrṇāti nikhilān doṣān: śr̄ = to destroy - She destroys all the flaws [of the devotees]*

²⁷ For various theological reasons, the devotees become the ones to bless God, as excessive love for Him makes them forget that He is the omnipotent God who is beyond danger. Periyālvār, for example, blesses Nārāyaṇa in his very first verse (*Periyālvār Tirumoli* 1.1).

²⁸ Pillai Lokācārya's and Vedānta Deśika's derivations are different, something that corresponds to their different theological positions on the nature and role of Śrī. For more on this topic, see, for example, Mumme 1989.

²⁹ We can mention his *Catuśślokībhāṣyam* (1), and more importantly, his *magnum opus*, the *Rahasyatrayasāram*, in which, while developing this idea in detail in his 28th chapter, which deals with the *dvaya-mantra*, he turns these keywords from the *Ahrbudhnyasamhitā* into words conjugated into the third person singular (the agent being Śrī):

Śrīśabdam, śrīyate, śrayate, śrṇoti, śrāvayati, śrṇāti, śrṇāti enṛu āṛu paṭiyāka bhagavachāstraṅkaṭilē nirvacanam paṇṇa pattiṛukkum.

The [etymology of] the word *śrī* is explained of being of six types in the scriptures of God, [namely,] *śrīyate, śrayate, śrṇoti, śrāvayati, śrṇāti, [and] śrīfāti.*

Traditionally, these words are interpreted thus: *śrīyate* ('She who is resorted to'), *śrayate* ('She resorts to [Nārāyaṇa']'), *śrṇoti* ('She listens'), *śrāvayati* ('She makes [someone] listen'), *śrṇāti* ('She removes'), *śrīfāti* ('She connects" (but also 'make ripe' for some Ācāryas, including Vedānta Deśika). See, for example, Uttamūr's gloss (1980: 951-60 fn) or Śrīrāmatēcikāccār 2001: 52fn.

2. *śr̄ṇāti ca gunair jagat*:³⁰ *śrī* = to mix, mingle – She connects the [people of] the world with good qualities
3. - *śrīyate cākhilair nityam* – root *śri* – to approach, to attain - She is always attained/ taken refuge with by all
 - *śrīyamāṇam* – She who is approachable [by all]
4. - *śrayate ca param padam* – (literally, ‘She abides in the Supreme Abode’) She takes refuge in the Lord³¹
 - *śrayantīm* – She who approaches [the Lord]
5. *śr̄ṇantīm* - She who listens
6. *śr̄ṇvantīm* – She who has someone listen to something.

Please note that the above interpretations are traditionally made ones (See, for example, Srīrāmatēcikāccār Svāmi 2001: 52fn). Deśika himself goes on to comment upon each word explaining them in some detail. By digging deeper, we find that Deśika’s Sanskrit quotations belong to the *Ahirbudhnyasamhitā*, and that the different passages of the Tamil verse above are all glosses of the different meanings of the Sanskrit word *śrī*, rendered into Tamil, based on a traditional understanding of an extract from this Pāñcarātra āgama. In his *Dvayaccurukku* 2, Deśika repeats these ideas in another Tamil verse, while explaining the suffix *matup* in the word *śrimannārāyaṇa* (‘Nārāyaṇa endowed with Śrī’) found in the *dvaya-mantra*:

aruv’ uru āṇavai taṇṇai aṭaintiṭa, tāṇ aṭaintu
 veruv’ urai kēṭ’ avai kēṭpitt’ akarrum viṇai vilakki
 iru talai aṇpu taṇāl emai iṇ aṭi cērtt’ aruḷum
 tiruvuṭaṇē tikalvār ceṛintār eṇkaļ cintaiyuļē.
 He who shines along with Śrī—who graciously joins us to [His] sweet feet
 out of love for both, having Herself reached [Him],
 as insentient and sentient beings reach Her,
 having listened to [their] fearful words and had them heard [by Him],
 removed the bad *karman* that separates [them from Him]—
 remained in our minds.

The subtle meanings of the word that the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas (*inter alia*) attributed to it are not something that a non-Sanskritist (or even a non-theologian for that matter) would recognize immediately, even in relatively straightforward verses like these, because the word *tiru* does not evoke such interpretations in the minds, of say, a Tamil reader. We can therefore go to the extent of calling these parts of Deśika’s verse as a somewhat fanciful translation of the word *śrī* into Tamil.

The importance of the word and the concept of Śrī for the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas can thus be seen from their writings. Such an enthusiasm seems to have gone on and affected

³⁰ In a personal communication, Harunaga Isaacson suggested that in *śr̄ṇāti ca gunair jagat*, *śr̄ṇāti* was the present tense of the verb *śrī* which means ‘to mix, mingle’, and that the sense of this *pāda* might then be approximately ‘she connects the world/ people with good qualities’. And that therefore, the name conveys both that she destroys all faults and that she bestows—connects with—good qualities. Traditionally, however, this verb has been interpreted as “causing someone to ripen/ to become mature” (see, for example, Deśika’s explanation of the words in his *Sārasāram* (16.1), under the passage quoted above). But in the verse from the *Mummaṇikkōvai* quoted above, it is not obvious where this role of Śrī is mentioned or alluded to. However, it seems that making the devotees approach Nārāyaṇa is achieved by making them mature first.

³¹ This is the traditional interpretation, in this case, given by Srīrāmatēcikāccār Svāmi (2001:52fn).

Tamil/Manipravala itself. For example, in their ardent devotion for the Divine Couple, some Ācāryas use their imagination to suggest uncommon meanings for some words that seem entirely unrelated to Śrī. One such instance can be found in the Nampillai's *Ītu muppattārāyirappati*, which comments on in *Tiruvāyomoli* 7.2.4 *cittanē tiruvaraṅkattu attāy* ('O wise One! O Father from Śrīraṅgam!') in the following way:

cittanē tirumāl enrapaṭi. pirāṭṭi viṣayattilē vyāmohattai uṭaiyavaṇ ennūtal. pirāṭṭiyai tan pakkalilē pittākki tuṭikka paṇṇumavaṇ ennūtal.

'Cittanē means Tirumāl. It means He who possesses mad love for the Goddess. It means He who makes the Goddess quiver/suffer acutely by driving [Her] crazy about Him'.

At first glance, it seems that Nampillai understands *cittanē*, apparently derived from *śiṣṭa* ('learned person, good person'), as 'He who possesses mad love for the Goddess' or 'He who makes the Goddess quiver/suffer acutely by turning [Her] crazy about Him',³² not the most straightforward interpretations, since this would have required him to derive the word *śiṣṭa* from *śāsu icchāyam*, the root *śās* in the meaning of desire.³³ Kuṇakarampākkam Rāmānuja Jīyar, the author of the sub-commentary *Jīyar arumpatavurai* (18th c.?), follows suits and seeks to clarify this gloss by suggesting that *cittanē* (presumably from *śrīṣṭhah*³⁴) means *śrīku ḫiṣṭhanē* 'He who is desirable to Śrī', with *śrī* being reduced to *ci* in Tamil. While this whole process is not etymologically impossible, it is not the most straightforward one either. And Nampillai's interpretation seems to have led the *Glossary of Historical Tamil Vaishnava Prose* to reserve a separate entry for this definition of *cittanē*,³⁵ which the TL does not.

Conclusions

To recapitulate, the word *śrī* apparently does not face or create any major issues in Tamil, which, on the contrary, seems to have adopted and adapted it, exploring and changing its sounds and meanings over the centuries. We have also seen that both *tiru* and *cīr* evolved independently and achieved their own semantic gains in Tamil and that in the case of *cīr*, this possibly is a result of *śrī* merging with a word in Tamil that already existed and probably sounded similar. Although this does not matter much, at least not for this study, it does seem that the word *tiru* is a *tadbhava* of *śrī*. Also, while the first millennium saw a rise in the use of the word, especially with the advent of the bhakti poets, its popularity seems to soar with the arrival of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ācāryas, who went back to its root and translated what they thought the word meant, for theological reasons mainly, but also for playing with it and its meanings in a multilingual and multicultural environment. Finally, as we noted above, while the existent reference works, like the TL or the GHTL, have been prepared meticulously by generations of

³² The TL only has an entry *cittanē* (< Skt. *śiṣya-*) 'pupil, disciple', and the other is in honorific, as a reference to a group of people: '*cittar* - < *śiṣṭa*. 1. Learned persons well versed in Vedic lore; 2. Wise, learned men'. Among the meanings relevant here, the Sanskrit *śiṣṭa* means 'disciplined, cultured, educated, learned, wise' as well as 'eminent, superior' (MW).

³³ I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing this out to me, and to S. L. P. Anjaneya Sarma, who confirmed in a personal communication that it must indeed be the commentator's over-imagination making him suggest such an uncommon gloss.

³⁴ This was suggested to me by S. L. P. Anjaneya Sarma.

³⁵ *cittanē (pe) tiruvukku mikavum vēṇṭiya tirumāl* ('Tirumāl who is most desirable to Śrī'). The *Glossary* illustrates the word with the example from the *Ītu* that we quoted above.

erudite scholars and therefore are absolutely essential to get us started, they have their own limitations and even flaws, which is why it is essential to be careful while using them.

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